

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 NSCE-00 PM-05 SP-02 SS-15
ICAIE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 PA-01
INRE-00 SSO-00 EA-10 EB-08 AID-05 /083 W
-----097086 121223Z /13

O R 121120Z APR 78

FM AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6541
INFO AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN
AMEMBASSY BERLIN
AMEMBASSY KINGSTON
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO
AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 GEORGETOWN 1107

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: GY, UR, PDIP
SUBJECT: PRIME MINISTER BURNHAM GOES EAST

REF: GEORGETOWN 1054 (NOTAL)

1. WITH A PARTY OF THIRTY-NINE (INCLUDING FOUR MINISTERS),
PRIMIN FORBES BURNHAM LEFT GEORGETOWN EARLY EVENING ON
APRIL 11 ON A 24-DAY TRIP WHICH WILL TAKE HIM TO MOSCOW,
PYONGYANG, BERLIN AND LONDON. ACCORDING TO GOVERNMENT
PRESS STATEMENTS, BURNHAM IS DUE BACK IN GUYANA ON MAY 5.

2. BURNHAM LEFT GUYANA AT A VERY CRITICAL MOMENT. THE
ECONOMY IS IN DISARRAY AND OVER THE LAST TEN DAYS A MAJOR
ELECTRICAL POWER CRISIS HAS STRUCK THE CAPITAL RESULTING
IN FREQUENT BALCKOUTS, INTERRUPTED WATER SUPPLY, AND AN
UNRELIABLE MARKET SITUATION; PUBLIC SERVICES HAVE BEEN
FREQUENTLY DISRUPTED AND, IN ORDER TO GET WATER, THE
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POPULACE ON TWO OCCASIONS HAS GONE INTO THE STREETS AND
BROKEN WATER MAINS AND HYDRANTS. (WATER SHORTAGE IS
DUE NOT ONLY TO POWER FAILURE AT THE PUMPING FACILITY BUT
ALSO TO A SUSTAINED DROUGHT WHICH HAS AFFECTED THE COUN-
TRY FOR SOME MONTHS.)

2. BURNHAM ALSO LEFT A MOST UNSETTLED POLITICAL CLIMATE

BEHIND HIM. ON APRIL 3 HE INTRODUCED IN PARLIAMENT A LEGISLATIVE PROPOSAL PROVIDING FOR A NATIONAL REFERENDUM WHICH IF APPROVED WOULD ENABLE HIM TO CHANGE THE CONSTITUTION EITHER IN PART OR IN TOTO BY A SIMPLE 2/3 VOTE IN THE PARLIAMENT HE CONTROLS. (AS IT NOW STANDS ANY IMPORTANT MODIFICATION TO THE CONSTITUTION REQUIRES A NATIONAL REFERENDUM ON THE SUBSTANCE OF THE CHANGE.

3. OVER THE LAST WEEK PUBLIC DEBATE SURROUNDING THIS PROPOSAL HAS GROWN IN INTENSITY AND HAS MADE POLITICAL ALLIES OF SUCH DISPARATE GROUPS AS THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND CHEDDI JAGAN'S MARXIST-LINE OPPOSITION PARTY. DESPITE THIS OPPOSITION BURNHAM RAMMED THROUGH THE REFERENDUM MOTION IN A MARATHON SESSION OF THE PARLIAMENT ON APRIL 10. HE NOW GOES OFF TO MOSCOW HAVING TAKEN THE FIRST STEP, AS HIS CRITICS CONTEND, IN THE DIRECTION OF TRANSFORMING GUYANA INTO A ONE-PARTY STATE. IN FACT AT ONE POINT DURING MONDAY'S DEBATE HE RESPONDED TO CRITICS WHO DEMANDED THAT THE DRAFT OF THE NEW CONSTITUTION ITSELF SHOULD BE SUBMITTED TO THE PEOPLE FOR APPROVAL, BY SAYING, "IT WOULD BE PROMULGATED AFTER FULL CONSULTATION WITH THE PEOPLE AS IT WAS DONE RECENTLY IN THE SOVIET UNION."

4. BURNHAM LEAVES TOO AN UNEASY BORDER SITUATION WITH NEIGHBORING SURINAM. DESPITE AN APPARENT WILLINGNESS ON THE PART OF THE SURINAMERS TO DISCUSS THE ISSUE IN CONFIDENTIAL

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QUESTON(I.E., FISHING RIGHTS FOR GUYANA IN THE CORENTYNE RIVER), BURNHAM'S GOVERNMENT HAS REFUSED TO MAKE ANY OVERTURES AND APPEARS DETERMINED TO TAKE A HARD LINE WITH PARAMARIBO.

5. IN ANY OTHER COUNTRY THE HEAD OF GOVERNMENT WOULD BE UNLIKELY TO ABSENT HIMSELF FACED WITH THE VERY REAL AND PRESSING PROBLEMS THAT CONFRONT THE GOVERNMENT HERE. NEVERTHELESS, A SIGN OF HIS SUPREME CONFIDENCE (THERE ARE SOME GUYANESE WHO DESMRIBE IT AS HIS DISDAIN OF THE POPULACE AND PARTICULARLY HIS OPPOSITION), BURNHAM HAS APPARENTLY GIVEN LITTLE THOUGHT TO POSTPONING OR CANCELING HIS TRIP.

6. FOR PUBLIC CONSUMPTION THE TRIP HAS BEEN BILLED AS AN EFFORT TO LAY THE GROUNDWORK FOR GREATER ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION BETWEEN GUYANA AND THE USSR, NORTH KOREA AND THE GERMAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC. IT IS UNLIKELY THAT BURNHAM WILL HAVE ANYTHING CONCRETE TO SHOW FOR HIS EFFORTS WHEN HE RETURNS FROM HIS VARIOUS VISITS. THE RUSSIANS HEVE SHOWN THEMSELVES VERY RELUCTANT TO PROVIDE ANYTHING IN THE WAY OF MEENINGFUL AID TO OUYANA IN THE

PAST; THE NORTH KOREANS HAVE LITTLE OR NOTHING TO SHARE EXCEPT IDEOLOGY; AND THE GUYANESE MINISTER OF TRADE JUST LAST MONTH RETURNED FROM A TRIP TO EAST GERMANY WITH LITTLE IN HAND. THE ONLY STOP WHERE IT IS LIKELY THAT HE WILL RECEIVE A SYMPATHETIC HEARING WHEN THE SUBJECT OF AID IS RAISED WILL BE THE LAST ONE, AND THERE IS NO REAL NEED FOR HIS GOING TO LONDON TO OPEN SUCH A DIALOGUE IN VIEW OF THE ONGOING BRITISH AID EFFORT ALREADY IN PLACE IN GEORGETOWN.

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DODE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 PA-01 SSO-00 EB-08 INRE-00
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FM AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 GEORGETOWN 1107

7. WHY THEN IS HE GOING? THERE ARE THOSE WHO SAY THAT BURNHAM WANTED TO BEAT HIS FRIEND AND CARICOM RIVAL, MICHAEL MANLEY OF JAMAICA, TO MOSCOW. (THE ONLY CARIBBEAN LEADER PREVIOUSLY TO HAVE VISITED THE SOVIET UNION WAS THE REDOUBTABLE AND INDEPENDENT ERIC WILLIAMS OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO.) IDEOLOGY SEEMS TO BE THE PRINCIPAL PURPOSE OF HIS TRIP. FOR YEARS BURNHAM HAS BEEN ATTEMPTING TO FORCE THE SOVIETS TO ABANDON SUPPORT FOR HIS ARCH POLITICAL RIVAL CHEDDI JAGAN. THERE ARE MANY IN GUYANA WHO FEEL THAT ARMED WITH HIS NEW DRAFT CONSTITUTION WHICH WILL PROVIDE FOR A GOVERNMENT MUCH MORE AUTHORITARIAN THAN ANY WHICH HAS EVER EXISTED HERE, HE INTENDS TO CONVINCE THE SOVIETS TO CAST JAGAN ASIDE AND LEND HIM AND HIS PNC FULL SUPPORT. SUCH A THEORY HAS MUCH TO RECOMMEND IT. WHETHER OR NOT THE SOVIETS

ARE PREPARED TO "BUY" IS ANOTHER MATTER. GIVEN THEIR
KNOWN RELUCTANCE TO ABANDON PROVEN FRIENDS, THERE ARE
THOSE WHO FEEL BURNHAM WILL NOT ACHIEVE THE GOAL HE
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